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An Analysis of American Violence

John Bolcato

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like very much to thank Professors Ernest E. Rossi and William A. Ritchie for kindly consenting to be members of my Thesis Committee and for the time, energy and keen intellects they applied to this task. Their advice proved to be an invaluable aid. I should also like to give special thanks to Professor Alan Isaak my Thesis Adviser for so generously affording his time, encouragement, patience, and guidance and for the cordial manner in which all were continually rendered. Thanks must also go to Mrs. Karen Williams for her cooperation in typing the original manuscript and lastly to Western Michigan University for allowing me to undertake such a project.

John Bolcato, Jr.
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BOLCATO, John, Jr.
AN ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN VIOLENCE.

Western Michigan University, M.A., 1975
Political Science, general

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"An idea, if it is really new is a genuine humiliation for the majority of the people; it is an affront not only to their sensibilities but to their deepest convictions. It offends against the things they worship, whether God or science or money."

--Arthur Miller
"Violence is not new to America. White men of European stock seized the lands of indigenous Indians with a ferocity which endured until our own times. The institution of slavery shaped the character of the nation and leaves its mark everywhere today. Countless 'local' wars were mounted throughout the Twentieth Century to protect commercial interests abroad. Finally, the United States emerged at Hiroshima as the arbiter of world affairs and self-appointed policeman of the globe .... What is new in 1969 is that for the first time many affluent Americans are learning a very little of this disconcerting picture."¹

The preceding quotation by Russell is an apt point of departure to begin an inquiry into American violence since it very succinctly yet forcefully defines America in terms not usually associated with her heritage. The central question with which this chapter will deal is whether Russell's characterization of America is at all correct. Is America in fact—past and present—a violent society? Perhaps an even more important question which will be dealt with in the final chapter is whether the immediate and distant future will be more or less violent?

In reviewing Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee, Geoffrey Wolff of Newsweek magazine states that no

other book he had reviewed had so saddened and shamed him. "Because the experience of reading it has made me realize for once and all that we as Americans really don't know who we are, or where we came from, or what we have done, or why." Another author who echoes the words of both Russell and Wolff is Clifford Geertz while writing an article entitled "Is America by Nature a Violent Society?" in The New York Times Magazine.¹ It is his belief that Americans do not know what kind of a people they are and what is more he feels that they have been deceiving themselves for far too long about who they really are:

"It [The United States] is a product of a long sequence of particular events whose interconnections our received categories of self-understanding are not only inadequate to reveal but are designed to conceal. We do not know very well what kind of society we live in, what kind of people we are. We are just now beginning to find out, the hard way ...."²

Very hopefully this paper will help to reveal who we Americans really are, where we came from and what we have done. However, before going any further it would perhaps be best to define violence as it is used in this


²Ibid.
paper and to distinguish the more pedestrian variety from political violence.

According to Nieburg, violence may be "unambiguously defined" as:

"... the most direct and sever form of physical power. It is force in action. Its use is a continuation of bargaining begun by other means, whether it is used by the state, by private groups, or by persons.... Violence equals demonstration of force tending toward counter-demonstration and escalation, or toward containment and settlement. Thus, force and violence merge imperceptibly."

Consistent with the above definition when I speak of violence in America I include all individual and collective acts of force: organized political acts and disorganized murders; all types of violent street crimes; and associated with all of the above—the mass media's constant romanticism of "America the violent" past, present, and future.

According to Nieburg, political violence is mainly distinguished from other forms of violence by its "political impact and effects:"

"... one may state a definition of political violence as: acts of disruption, destruction, injury whose purpose, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and/or effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behavior of others in a bargaining situation that has consequences for the social system."^2


^loc. cit., p. 13.
For Nieburg political violence like other forms of violence usually has an object or victim and is motivated ("calculated or impulsive"). Yet perhaps somewhat offhandedly he more clearly distinguishes it from other forms of violence when he cites organization of an activity as being relevant to all forms of political behavior.¹ That is, political violence may be viewed or defined more specifically as being an organized activity with a political end in mind. This latter definition is consistent with Nieburg's definition of political violence in having political significance yet it narrows its scope by emphasizing it as a purposive political act.

To summarize, in this paper violence may be seen as a purposeful or spontaneous forceful activity and political violence as a politically purposeful, forceful activity. However this latter definition is not to exclude spontaneous acts or seemingly apolitical acts which may have very great political consequences or to use Nieburg's terms "political impact and effects." Examples of the latter would be some of the riots and burnings of the nineteen sixties or perhaps the assassination of a public figure. What is more while all forms of violence are usually motivated ("calculated or impulsive") the political variant is more apt to be of an organized type

¹ibid.
involving a number of actors and designed to fulfill a political end or purpose. Political violence is nonetheless here seen as being subsumed under the category of general American violence. Therefore as violence in America increases it is likely that political violence will also increase.

With violence so defined—we may now proceed to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: the myth or reality of a violent America. Schlesinger writing in Violence: America in the Sixties, notes in a chapter entitled "Shooting: The American Dream," that the tensions of an industrial society do not fully explain why Americans shoot and kill so many fellow Americans. He explains that England, Japan and West Germany are next to the United States the most heavily industrialized countries in the world yet their collective population of 214 million people experiences only 135 gun murders a year while the 200 million people of the United States experience some 6,500 gun murders a year—"about forty-eight times as many."¹ He further notes that in Philadelphia alone—the city of brotherly love—with a population of two million, as many criminal homicides were committed there in one year as were

committed in all of England, Scotland and Wales combined
to make a population of 45 million. More recent figures
would likely be higher for all the countries named
including the United States. Indeed a recent article in
Time magazine characterized Detroit, Michigan (population
1.5 million) as "murder city" since it had 601 homicides—
"one for every 2,500 people"— in 1972 and was 27 per cent
ahead of that rate in April of 1973. 1 Abrahamsen—an
author and New York psychiatrist—states that America
has had an "unending tread" of hidden violence stretch­ing
through its history. To use his words:

"Throughout our country, people are murdered
rampantly. There are mass random shootings
and riots in many of our cities. There are
tumultuous demonstrations and counter­
demonstrations provoking violent police
action during which innocent newspaper men
and onlockers are clubbed. The slums thrive
as breeding grounds of racial violence,
ghetto uprisings, and vicious battles.
Crime syndicates operating under cover
terrorize and corrupt our citizens and
institutions. Extremist groups under the
guise of patriotism advocate and activate
hatred. Our President, our Vice President,
and other government officials receive
daily a flood of threatening letters and
telephone calls from would-be assassins." 2

Abrahamsen finds one obvious reason for the higher
number of murders in our society, namely the easy

2 Abrahamsen, David, Our Violent Society. New York:
availability of firearms. Although gun interests and individual proponents would claim that people not guns kill, countless cases show that the easy availability of firearms in American society makes the killing of one's fellow man an all too convenient alternative if not in some instances the very incentive for the act. In the same article of Time cited earlier a Detroit police officer comments that after the ghetto riots of 1967 "It seemed like everybody went out and bought a gun." 1 With the result—and the police log offers substantiation—that: "Now that so many guns are handy, the argument over the kitchen table at 2 a.m., which might once have ended in a punch in the nose, has a good chance of ending with a bullet in the gut." 2

Comparing the number of gun murders in the United States to those in other countries reveals a definite correlation between the easy availability of firearms and deaths committed by such means. In 1962 both England and Wales combined which have one-fourth the population of the United States, had "29 murders by gunfire, while in the United States, 7,000 killings were carried out with guns," and in 1967, 63 per cent, of the 12,090 people

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1Time, op. cit.
2ibid.
murdered in the United States were shot to death. The gun has been in America's past and in the present continues to be her principal murder weapon. Abrahamsen further notes that because of America's glorification of the gun and our easy access to it, Americans kill family members more regularly than is the case in any other country.

Associated with America's violent tradition is also the prevalence of a comparatively higher rate of physical cruelty in American homes exercised by parents against their children. It is estimated that up to 10,000 children per year are maltreated by their parents. There is also an overwhelming rise in juvenile crime throughout the nation. "From 1960 to 1967, police arrests in the ten-to-seventeen age group jumped 72 per cent, while the corresponding increase in the population was only 22 per cent."¹ What is more, according to The New York Times (September 3, 1967)² more children died from abusive treatment in the United States in 1962 than died from leukemia, cystic fibrosis, and muscular dystrophy combined. This upsurge in child beatings is paralleled by the over-whelming increase of crime and general violence in our society and is seen by Abrahamsen

¹Abrahamsen, op. cit., p. 8.
²Cited by Abrahamsen.
as reflective of "a definite behavior pattern in our society."\(^1\) Illustrative of this trend is the increase in the number of serious crimes (murder, negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) committed in our society from 1941--a little more than 1.5 million--to 1968--almost 4.5 million. From the period of 1960 to 1967 serious crime increased 88 per cent while population grew only 10 per cent.\(^2\)

In his introduction to Violence In America Rose\(^3\) asserts that violence is an integral and central part of American politics, society and culture. It is regarded as a solution to personal and social problems and as he puts it:

"It \(\sqrt{\text{Violence}}\) is generic and fundamental to the substance of American life, a major theme ingrained in our life styles, and is part of the individual character, as well as institutionalized in the socio-economic-political structure."

Rose believes that violence has been omnipresent in American history from the nation's birth up to the present time with most Americans imposing their will upon weaker peoples and nations. Interestingly Americans have combined a special brand of violence with an air of

\(^1\)loc. cit., p. 14.
\(^2\)loc. cit., p. 4.
righteousness. They have chosen to regard incidences of American propagated violence as abnormalities or marginal. By teachers, text, and the mass media, Americans are led to believe that their heritage is one of justifiable homicide. The American Indian was a renegade anyway; the West had to be won with a gun; wars are often necessary to protect our freedom and the freedom of "self determination" for those halfway around the world even if it means the annihilation of countries and peoples we are "protecting" not to speak of the cost in lives spent of our own young men. Tristram Coffin in The Armed Society, elaborates upon a view of America that has not been made widespread in American history classes:

"The American missionary spirit is not exclusively peaceful. There is no evidence that we are peace-loving or ever have been. We have taken what we wanted by force if need be, sometimes muttering a proper prayer over the vanquished. We shoved the Indians off their lands without a how-do-you-do; drove out the Dutch, British, French, and Spanish; fought Mexico and seized California with as little ceremony as the Russians grabbing the Baltic states; engaged in a savage Civil War; fought in Cuba and the Philippines; staged our own 'revolution' in Hawaii against the native queen; kept gunboats and Marines in China, and invented and used the great horror weapon, the nuclear bomb, in World War II. Through it all we have maintained a righteous air, contending that we have committed mayhem and felony with the purest motives. This is a result of our Puritan inheritance, which requires proof that

\[1\text{loc. cit., p. xxi.}\]
God is on our side in every expedition and sanguinary action."

Basically what Coffin is saying is what has been said in countless episodes of violence so popular on the mass media: "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition!"

Relevant to the outbursts of violence in the 1960's is Rose's distinction between "violence as revolt and as control." That is violence used by the oppressed and by the oppressors, and he suggests that to know the difference is essential to guard against, both anarchy or a police state. Moreover, it is Rose's feeling that the violent revolt is basically caused by injustice and inequality. He believes that much violence throughout America's history has been the result of an inequitable distribution in the nation's wealth. The rich have usually had military and governmental power on their side while those fighting for more of the systems offerings have been provoked by frustration and the arrogance of wealth. Thus violence between rich and poor has been exemplified by "draft riots, slavery, labor violence, race riots, and the civil rights movement" to name just a few instances of more dramatic eruption. All of those examples listed by Rose appear to have definite political implications and as such I believe may

\[\text{loc. cit., xxiii.}\]
justifiably be cited as examples of political violence. More politically relevant is the fact that commonly when the poor have reacted violently to their position at the bottom of the economic-status hierarchy in American society, they have been suppressed mercilessly. This form of violence—exercised by the state in the name of law and order or such vague terms as freedom or self-determination—has been a great deal more effective than that exercised by the weak and oppressed. As Rose sees it, much of the violence in the United States "lies within the process of allowing and keeping one third of a nation poor." This being linked to "the institutionalization of social, economic, and political inequality. Wealth and power are linked and seem to be a function of making sure some people are poor and kept that way, or are killed off or sent away, e.g., Indians or political radicals."\(^1\) A statement made by a onetime Cook County, Illinois prosecutor perhaps best sums up the relationship between poverty and street crime; taken together with Rose's views on politics and poverty one gets some idea of how poverty, street crime and politics may be related. The statement is in conformance with Rose's views and is as follows: "The poor kill the poor for poor reasons." This statement apparently remains true. However even

\(^1\)ibid.
more so today since crime is spreading to the once pristine suburbs. As some Americans call for more law and order others demand justice; poverty and crime continue and many people still fail to see a correlation between governmental policies or a lack of them and continued violence of all kinds in American society. One former governmental official who did not fail to make the connection between despair, destruction, and a high crime rate was Abraham Lincoln when he asked the following question:

"When ... you have succeeded in dehumanizing the Negro; when you have put him down to be but as the beasts of the field; when you have extinguished his soul in this world and placed him where the ray of hope is blown out as in the darkness of the damned, are you quite sure that the demon you have roused will not turn and rend you?"

Throughout American history it seems that American violence has always been regarded in some very positive way—at least from an American perspective. The nation itself was born as a result of the Revolutionary War; the land was settled as a result of the "Indian Wars;" the freeing of the slaves and the preservation of the Union was a result of Civil War violence; vigilante violence restored order on the lawless frontier; agrarian and labor violence elevated both the farmer and the laborer and finally police violence is regarded by many guardians

1Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 35.
of the status quo as the means by which the peace is kept and law and order preserved within our society.\(^1\) The author of the above thoughts—historian Richard Maxwell Brown—further asserts that although it is seldom included within our formal value structure, violence has established itself as a crucial factor in our real but unacknowledged value structure. From a socio-political point of view sociologist Charles Tilly\(^2\) writing in *Violence In America*, points out that collective violence and Western civilization have always been close partners; that violence flows naturally from the central political processes of Western countries, and that major shifts in power relationships have often been the result of exceptional movements of collective violence. Sheldon Levy,\(^3\) a psychologist, after a statistical analysis of the past 150 years of violence in America, conducted through the use of a sampling of representative newspapers, has concluded with some caution—due to the limitations of the sample—that Americans are a violence prone people and

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\(^2\)Tilly, Charles, "Collective Violence in European Perspective," in Graham and Gurr, p. 4.

\(^3\)Levy, Sheldon G., "Appendix A 150—Year Study of Political Violence in the United States," in Graham and Gurr, p. 84.
that while present levels of contemporary violence rank high, the turmoil in the latter third of the 19 century probably ranks higher. According to Philip Taft and Philip Ross, the United States has had the bloodiest and most violent history of any industrialized nation the world over. The labor disputes before World War I were apparently in many respects not unlike the student protest movement of the sixties. Armed troops were usually employed, police brutality charges were common, and occasionally pickets were shot and killed. Indeed following the shooting and killing of ten pickets by the police at the Republic Steel Corporation in Chicago in 1937 a United States Senate committee's findings were similar to those of the Walker Report following the 1968 Democratic national convention debacle in that same city. Walker called it a "police riot"; the Senate had this to say of the 10 pickets shot by the police:

"The provocation for the police assault did not go beyond abusive language and throwing of isolated missiles from the rear rank of the marchers .... From all evidence we think it plain that the force employed by the police was far in excess of that which the occasion required."2

To add to the allegations of police brutality the


2loc. cit., p. 359.
1961 Report on Justice of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded "Police brutality ... is a serious problem in the United States."\(^1\) Howard Zinn\(^2\) writing in *Disobedience and Democracy* in talking about resistance to the draft, the Viet Nam War, and violence in our cities feels that these are not the conditions which have caused trouble in our society rather they are the results of them. The major problem afflicting the world's people is a gross and unjust distribution of wealth according to Zinn.

In 1963 John F. Kennedy, one of our nation's most beloved Presidents was assassinated. In 1968 two more of the nation's most loved and respected leaders, Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, were the victims of violent murder by assassins. Again in 1972 George C. Wallace a Presidential aspirant was shot five times while shaking hands with well-wishers. All of this along with a feeling of heightened tension both in our larger cities and suburbs, as well as our smaller towns, makes one wonder about the future of America with regards to violence. Accordingly I shall in this paper attempt to make

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sense out of what I believe to be a worsening situation of escalating American violence. What I have attempted to do in researching this paper is to determine if America may be justly characterized as a violent nation and if so in what respects. My findings have lead me to believe that traditionally and culturally we have been and continue to be a violent people. However with regard to civil strife we rank only 24th in a listing of 114 nations (comprising more than 98 per cent of the world's population).¹ Other authors have determined by using various methods of measurement that during an 18 year period from 1948 to 1965, the United States falls into a median position with regard to world political violence ranking 24th in a list of 84 nations.² So while we Americans may not be the most violent of the world's people in the area of civil strife, it nonetheless appears that our nation was born out of violence, currently revels in violence on both the mass media, and on the streets of our nation and increasingly violence appears to be very significantly interjecting itself into our political processes.


One wonders whether Americans are a "trigger happy" people; the victims of a cultural lag hypothesis in which an advanced technological society has given us the means of all too ready destruction of our fellow man without our full comprehension of this destructive ability. Carried to its logical conclusion this assumption means that millions more will suffer violent deaths before Americans realize that they are "programed" to choose the violent alternative by a cultural predisposition to violence which is in turn heightened by an increasing pace of daily life, tension, alienation from themselves and their fellow men, bureaucratic dehumanization and the general social upheavals that are an unfortunate part of progress. Domestic instances of violence which have occurred throughout the sixties and to the present in America such as the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, the wounding of Governor George Wallace, the escalation of violent street crimes, racial riots in our major cities, campus rebellion and excessive counter-reactions by law enforcement officers—not to mention the Viet Nam War which has been the longest in our nation's history—have all contributed towards a basic hypothesis of this paper: namely that violence in America is very much on the increase and that law and order in a democratic society may very well be a myth never to be realized without
equal justice for all. Other hypotheses which succeeding chapters concern themselves with are the following: 1) that man is not inherently aggressive 2) that America is traditionally a violent nation 3) that America is culturally a violent nation and lastly 4) that if Americans do not reform their attitudes about American violence they will likely experience increasing amounts of it in the future.

Today America as a nation and Americans individually have a potential for greatness unequalled in the history of the world; they also have the greatest potential for destruction ever to be realized in the history of the world. It is a basic postulate of this paper that our cultural predisposition greatly enhances the latter—our potential for destruction—on a personal, national, and global scale while the former—our ability to achieve unprecedented greatness in all of the above areas is too little explored as the result of a preoccupation with problems that should have long been solved. Such as ways in which individuals and nations may better work together for the benefit of all. The following chapters shall deal with various elements and aspects of American violence but before getting into them the next chapter will provide some basic and essential information on the relationship between psychology, man, and violence.
In his book *Violent Men, an Inquiry Into The Psychology of Violence*, Hans Toch, views violence as not being amenable to any circumscribed legal or socioeconomic classification. Rather as he states it:

"... Violence must be viewed in the context of taverns and school rooms, in prison cells and living rooms; it encompasses felons and police officers, inmates and guards, it covers brawls and killings, riots and revolts."¹

Later in his book, Toch quotes a portion of a *Time*² magazine article that exemplifies the current extent to which State violence has become mechanized and impersonal violence par excellence:

"Harris lined up the target in the luminous cross hairs of his screen, threw two switches that opened the bomb bay and armed the load of 108 bombs. Over the radio, the impersonal voice of a SAC ground controller announced 'seven minutes to 'hack' (bomb release point).'

The count droned on until at hack, when Harris punched a black button and 30 tons of high explosives cascaded toward the ground more than 30,000 feet below us. There was no shock, no noise, no sight of explosions. Only the impersonal voice of the controller: 'Bombs in the target area. That was a good run, fellows. Have a nice ride home and see you another day.' Thigpen banked again and we...


²loc. cit., p. 213.
were on our way back to Guam, six monotonous hours and 2,600 miles away. In a small oven in the cockpit the men began heating TV dinners. They had not seen their target, their enemy, or the effect of their mission."

Toch believes that violent men commit violent acts not because of the high level of violence on the mass media; not because of the easy availability of firearms in a given society but rather for a very pragmatic reason: "because men find it [Violence] satisfying and effective in achieving their ends."¹ He therefore feels that the only way in which violence may be combatted is to "remove the incentives for it, and by changing the motives that produce it." To do the latter he feels "close-quarter, face-to-face combat with real-life violent men"² is required.

Upon the assumption that Toch means psychological combat as opposed to physical combat this chapter will attempt to delve into various psychological theories relevant to man and his aggressive instincts be they manifested in their domestic or State forms. (The terms domestic and State violence may be equated with those categories of violence which include such occurrences as street crime and intrafamily violence and political violence as defined in the introductory

¹loc. cit., p. 219.
²ibid.
chapter). This chapter's main concern will be to attempt to ascertain whether man is truly "a wolf" as Freud has termed him; whether he is innately aggressive as Lorenz claims; whether he is potentially a benign, caring, even divine species; or whether he is ironically—one in the same—wolf, innately aggressive, benign, caring, and at times even divine.

It seems that from the ethnologist's point of view as represented by such men as Morton Bard¹ and Konrad Lorenz,² man is innately aggressive and his aggressive responses are "purely and simply evolutionary extensions of his biological past."³ Lorenz finds from his observations of fish and other animals that aggression—in these species at least—is "an essential part of the life-preserving organization of instincts."⁴ He does however go on to state that such aggression may eventually become destructive should it "function in the wrong way." Conversely he does not think that modern man's inherent aggressive instincts are necessarily a part of his life-preserving organization of instincts. Indeed as he

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³Bard, op. cit., p. 150.
⁴Lorenz, op. cit., p. 44.
states it:

"An unprejudiced observer from another planet, looking upon man as he is today, in his hand the atom bomb, the product of his intelligence, in his heart the aggression drive inherited from his anthropoid ancestors, which his same intelligence cannot control, would not prophesy long life for the species."\(1\)

Unlike many sociologists and psychologists, Lorenz does not see aggression as a reaction to external factors but rather as an ethnologist he sees it largely as a species—preserving instinct (apparently excluding the example of modern man) and as such he calls particular attention to the danger of the spontaneity connected with its use. According to Lorenz man is not the "irrevocable and unsurpassable image of God," on the contrary he believes "that the long-sought missing link between animals and the really humane being is ourselves!"\(2\) Lorenz feels that in order for a more humane being to evolve man's knowledge of himself must take place. He sees man's social organization as being similar in certain respects to that of rats. Rats like humans he finds are social and peaceful beings within their clans but "veritable devils" in their behavior towards other members of their species who are not

\(1\) loc. cit., p. 46.

\(2\) loc. cit., p. 221.
members of their own communities.¹ This says much to explain chauvinism, racism, and other similar phenomenon. Simply stated Lorenz believes that present-day man possesses an overabundance of aggressive drive which has its origins in prehistoric times when early man needed that drive in order to survive against nature, animals, and other men.² "To the humble seeker of biological truth there cannot be the slightest doubt that human militant enthusiasm evolved out of a communal defense response of our prehuman ancestors."³ It is Lorenz's belief that militant enthusiasm in man is an instinctive response phylogenetically determined and that such enthusiasm when it infects great masses of people may have devastating effects over-riding all other considerations.⁴

Robert Ardrey takes Lorenz's belief in the innate aggressive instincts in both men and animals a step farther. He claims in his book The Territorial Imperative⁵ that the innate aggressive responses of both animals and man has a great deal to do with their strong

¹loc. cit., p. 229.
²loc. cit., p. 235.
³loc. cit., p. 261.
⁴loc. cit., p. 265.
territorial imperatives. Ardrey defines a territory as an area of space; either water, air, or earth which an animal or group of animals defends "as an exclusive preserve." It is also, he goes on to say, an "inward compulsion in animate beings to possess and defend such a space."¹

Animal biologist John P. Scott² disagrees with both Lorenz and Ardrey. He maintains that aggression is a learned response rather than an innate urge which must be satisfied like hunger or sex. Lynne B. Iglitzin³ reports that carefully controlled studies of primates have supported Scott's thesis that aggression in animals is learned not innate.

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, apparently would agree with the position taken by both Lorenz and Ardrey. He sees man as a wolf and it is only the forces of civilization which discourage him from acting out his innate aggressive instincts. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud has this to say of man's aggressive instincts:

¹Ibid.


³Ibid.
"... men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him. Man is a wolf to man."¹

Freud felt that the most society could do would be to modify man's innate aggressive instincts. It is a major premise of this paper that certain societies have been more successful in modifying man's aggressive instincts than others for various cultural and historical reasons and that American society with its enormous potential for doing good has been one of those societies which has not modified its peoples' aggressive instincts sufficiently. Rather it has either wittingly or unwittingly heightened those instincts for the purpose of gaining either more power or profit: most notably in the instances of war and our defense budget; the pervasiveness of violence on the mass media and the ability of lobbying arms and munitions manufactures to make ours an armed-to-the-teeth-society. Those aggressive instincts are

further encouraged in American society by increased
depersonalization and a faster pace of living—both by­
products of the rapid urbanization taking place in many
areas of America.

Freud nonetheless felt that society could divert
and sublimate man's aggressive instincts both on an
individual and on a societial basis. As Iglitzin
succinctly puts it: "In other words, aggression can
be modified through education and socialization, but
it remains a universal and unvaried instinctual drive
for all."\(^1\)

Neiburg in commenting on the Lorenz-Ardrey view of
man's innate aggressive instincts sees them as looking
upon human nature as the source of evil. What is more
he believes theirs is "an ideology of complacency,
inaction, and defeatism because it justifies the
inevitability of violence and the hopelessness of
provisional remedies."\(^2\) Desmond Morris a zoologist and
author of The Naked Ape: A Zoologist Study of the
Human Animal, also believes that the Lorenz-Ardrey
view of an innately aggressive man should not be
accepted uncritically since "domination is the goal of
aggression, not destruction, and basically we do not

\(^1\)Iglitzin, op. cit., p. 37.
\(^2\)Neiburg, op. cit., p. 37.
seem to differ from other species in this respect."

According to current psychological theory man is neither warlike nor peaceful. Norman L. Munn\(^2\) states that it is true that man has certain physiological needs which demand satisfaction. However if he is able to satisfy these needs without hindrance and if his behavior has not been conditioned towards aggressiveness by this group," then his behavior is characterized as peaceful. Very much to the point of the major thesis of this paper: that Americans are traditionally, culturally, and environmentally conditioned to be aggressive people, Munn has the following to say:

"One must not overlook the additional fact that each of us is born into a situation where certain cultural patterns, including traditional antipathies, already exist. These may mold us into aggressive or peaceful individuals, regardless of whether satisfaction of our needs is thwarted or threatened with frustration."\(^3\)

On the subject of frustration and aggression and in any discussion of man's aggressive behavior Dollard’s et al. frustration-aggression theory must be mentioned. Very briefly the theory holds that when one becomes

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\(^3\)ibid.
frustrated one will very likely become aggressive as a result; that this aggressiveness will be directed at the source of the frustration when possible, and if not at all possible, then the aggression will be displaced on a weaker target or what is commonly called a scapegoat. It should however be noted that not all aggression emanating from frustration is acted out against others. In some instances aggression may be directed at the self in the forms of depression or in extreme cases even suicide. Nieburg sees the frustration-aggression theory as representing "a very primitive state of the psychological art," and not of great value since frustration does not (as mentioned above) always lead to aggression and to endlessly qualify this theory makes it lose its proposed validity.¹

Those are just a few psychological views of man as he relates to violence. One final view—which is a bit more flattering to man than the Freudian concept of man as wolf or Lorenz's belief which emphasizes man's alleged innate aggressiveness—and one which I would agree with is put forth by one of the most noted contemporary humanist psychoanalysts—Rollo May.² He insists that both evil and good are present in everyone.

¹Nieburg, op. cit., p. 41.
In this connection one may safely conclude that the physical and psychological environment must play a significant role in molding man's behavior. May would concur I believe since he states "that when we develop a society which trains us rightly, we'll all be in fine shape." It is stated however that May does not believe that it is society's fault that we are the way we are since "strong individual" will always step forth from "the conditioned mass" to rebel. I for one however cannot see how a restructuring of society into one "which trains us rightly" could occur unless it were society's fault to some extent that we are the way we are to begin with. In accordance with May's general views are humanistic psychology, much in contemporary psychoanalysis and existential philosophy,—the Sartrian brand of which teaches that man is no more than the sum of his acts.

So in reply to the query posed at the beginning of this chapter it is my opinion based upon reading the authors cited and others that man does have an innate predisposition towards aggression yet he also has an innate predisposition towards being benign and possibly under the right circumstances even divine. In the case of Americans, I would say that due to traditional, cultural and increasingly environmental factors (such
as increased dehumanization and a faster paced society), we are a people who have not nearly realized our potential for becoming a more benign species. What is more it appears that we are becoming a more dehumanized, callous, intolerant, violent people every day. The pressures to treat people more humanely are becoming more and more conspicuously absent in American society and the potential for violence is more than ever increasingly in evidence. Two other ethnologists—Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox—are said to have preached "that man's survival as a species depends on finding out what kind of a creature he is."¹ We as Americans—the inhabitants of the wealthiest and most powerful nation ever in the history of the world—have a special obligation to the rest of the world's people to see ourselves more clearly than we have in the past specifically because we have the greatest potential both for the betterment or the utter annihilation of so many other peoples. The succeeding chapters hopefully will aid our vision.

¹loc. cit., p. 81.
"... we love violence, we love to fight. The blood from our frontier days still runs through our veins. Our's is an aggressively oriented society."

David Abrahamsen, M.D.

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1 Abrahamsen, op. cit.
AMERICA'S TRADITION OF VIOLENCE

America, as was mentioned earlier, was born out of violence, became the United States of America through revolutionary violence, fought a civil war to remain the United States of America and has engaged in a variety of forms of violence in its efforts to grow as a country both economically and geographically. The present chapter will dwell on some of the more prominent aspects of America's traditional relationship with violence.

According to Graham and Gurr, editors of the most definitive work on American violence: *The History of Violence in America,* Americans in spite of all their rhetoric have never been a very law-abiding people and illegal violence has often been abundantly rewarded. Moreover they find that public sympathy has often been on the side of the law-breaker—"sometimes with the night-rider who punished the transgressor of community mores, sometimes with the integrationists who refused to obey racial segregation laws."² They find that the lack of full respect for the law (be it warranted or not) and the support for violence in one's own interest have both contributed towards the justification of private violence

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¹Graham and Gurr, op. cit., p. 634.
²Ibid.

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and thereby helped to make America both in the past and present "a tumultuous society." As Frantz\(^1\) points out American folklore is replete with tales of the men who tamed the wild west. Rambling, gambling, hard drinking, fast shooting, peace loving types like Wild Bill Hickok who, according to Frantz "shared a good many of the qualities of a mad dog." Back in those days as it seems it is sometimes the case today, the lawman (or law and order man) was as closely associated with the initiation of violence as the outlaw. Along with the tradition of glamorizing violent men on either side of the law and sometimes on different sides at different times, several authors point out that the majority of white Americans have, since the inception of this country, been more prone to mete out violence to those of another race. Indians, Afro-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans and finally Orientals have received a disproportionate share of grief not only from "more respectable" Americans but also from some of their own kind. This is true to a great extent to this very day as it has been throughout American history. Also questioned by some is whether atomic bombs would have been dropped at all in the Second World War had the Japanese enemy been

European. America's racism towards Orientals was clearly demonstrated by this nation's early immigration restrictions. The Chinese were excluded in 1882 and the Japanese in 1907. Further proof of blatant American racism was the Japanese Relocation Program during World War II. No other caucasian aliens—Germans, nor Italians, were treated in this way.¹

The longest wars in the history of America took place from 1607 to 1890—these were the Indian wars. James, in her book Poverty, Politics, and Change, reveals that one of our beloved Presidents was elected to the highest office in the land using a victory slogan from a battle in those wars in which he, in violation of orders, attacked an Indian village populated by old men and women: "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!"² Brown³ notes that the small number of Indians living on the land before white settlers came "allowed plenty of room for the expansion of white settlement." Furthermore the settlers possessed resources which could have easily reimbursed the Indians for the land they came to occupy. According to Brown, "It is possible that no other factor

²loc. cit., p. 35.
³Brown, op. cit., p. 66.
has exercised a more brutalizing influence on the American character than the Indian wars."¹ It seems that not only was the white man's cause an unjust one; not only was there scalping and tortures of various kinds, slaughter of defenseless women and children on both sides but if we are to believe Dee Brown²—whose book was largely documented with data found in the Congressional Record and other United States governmental sources—the white man broke an enormous string of promises made to the Indians, drove them off of their land, put them on reservations, and at every opportunity attempted to verify the then popular slogan: "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." Frantz³ tells of what had to be one of the bloodiest single experiences in the history of America: the Sand Creek massacre. It occurred shortly after sundown on November 28, 1864 when Col. J. M. Chivington and his men charged through a group of 500 peaceful Indian followers of Chief Black Kettle who had raised both an American and then a white flag before the charge. The charge left 450 of the 500 Indians laying slaughtered about the ground. Women and children had

¹loc. cit., p. 67.


³Frantz, op. cit., p. 148.
been "dragged out, shot, knifed, scalped, clubbed, mutilated, their brains knocked out, bosoms ripped open."
The reaction to all this was to make Col. Chivington and his men heroes. This is not to say that there were not Indian slaughters of white men. Perhaps most notable was Sitting Bull's complete destruction of Colonel George A. Custer and his 265 men at Little Big Horn by 2,500 Sioux Indians. The point is that America's short history has been an extremely violent one and that the past incidences of violence are likely to encourage the present use of violence to solve personal, social and political problems both at home and abroad. Problems arise when the old methods for resolving conflicts do not work.

The most persistent form of American violence although by and large not quite as blatantly savage as that directed towards the American Indian dates as far back as the 18th century. This is the centuries old racial conflict between blacks and whites. In 1712 the first slave uprising occurred in New York City and that uprising like those since have been put down ruthlessly. With the end of institutionalized slavery, the Ku Klux Klan came into being in the South and has according to Brown,¹ "been one of the most consistent features in the

¹ Brown, Richard Maxwell, op. cit., p. 52.
last hundred years of American violence." With regard to racial violence Abrahamsen\(^1\) sees nothing surprising about the black rebellion in such places as Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859 or the racial violence that erupted in such cities as Watts, Chicago, Detroit, and Newark in the 1960's. "Can we expect anything else when one hundred eighty million white people keep over twenty million of their negro fellow citizens outside the mainstream of American life?" It is well known that the father of our country—George Washington—himself owned slaves as did a number of other early Presidents. It was felt in Washington's day that "tampering with the indenture system would bring sever social and economic dislocations."\(^2\) Brown notes that from 1882 to 1903 1,985 blacks were killed by Southern lynch mobs—when they weren't burned alive—for the supposed crimes of murder, rape, or the mere suspicion of a lesser crime. "Lynch-mob violence became an integral part of the post-Reconstruction system of white supremacy."\(^3\) This is not to say that the "necktie party" was reserved solely for the black man. Brown further notes that the West, North, and Eastern parts of the country held their own

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\(^1\)Abrahamsen, op. cit., pp. 61-62.


\(^3\)Brown, Richard Maxwell, op. cit., p. 50.
in this regard as a means of punishing the thief, rapist, rustler and murdering white man. The element of racial hatred however was not likely a prejudicial factor in judging the guilt of the accused nor in the harshness of the punishment rendered in the case of white crime.

Another type of American violence which may not usually strictly conform to the definition of violence stated in chapter one yet should not be overlooked since it probably effects more Americans than any other is ethnic and/or religious prejudice. Although this sort of American violence is not as forceful in its present form it is a kind of violence which has been present in America throughout much of its history. This type of violence may be termed WASP violence since it is usually exemplified by white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants although it is not limited exclusively to them. As Abrahamsen\(^1\) explains it, the WASP denies different racial, ethnic and/or religious groups status and security in order that he may be reinforced in the feeling that he has attained both status and security. Perhaps the most startling example of religious intolerance has been the experience of Jews, Catholics and Mormons in the past and to a lesser extent in present

\(^1\)Abrahamsen, op. cit., p. 83.
day United States. In *Violence In America* Frantz\(^1\) relates an incident in which over 120 Missourian farmers moving west to California were massacred at Mountain Meadows, Utah by a settlement of fearful Mormons who had been severely harassed in the past for their religious beliefs and because "they tended to prosper." Particularly telling of America's violent frontier past and more than just hinting at her history of racism is an excerpt from *The El Paso Daily Times* dated June 2, 1884 featuring one of the frontier's most famous law-enforcers known as "The Law West of the Pecos"—Judge Roy Bean:

"Here is the latest on Roy Bean: Somebody killed a Chinaman and was brought up standing before the irrepressible Roy, who looked through two or three dilapidated law books from stem to stern and finally turned the culprit loose remarking that he'd be d----d if he could find any law against killing a Chinaman."\(^2\)

Very much a part of America's frontier tradition is vigilantism. Since people moved West at a faster rate than formally instituted justice and since there were many who attempted to capitalize upon this occurrence, the settlers of the West banded together for the protection of their lives and property. The result was instant justice or injustice whatever the case may have

\(^1\) Frantz, op. cit., p. 149.
\(^2\) Abrahamsen, op. cit., p. 191.
been. A little jingle found pinned to the body of a man who had been hung by vigilantes in Casper, Wyoming in the year of 1902 communicates the people's attitude toward those who were thought to have violated the law:

"Process of law is a little slow so this is the road you'll have to go. Murderers and thieves, Beware! PEOPLE'S VERDICT."\(^1\)

Frantz reports that at other times it was considered "neat and economical" (what with the lack of jails) to murder the offender on the spot. Or if one had a little more time the offender might be, as noted earlier, hung or tied to a tree to be starved or stung to death—all part of every day existence on the frontier.\(^2\) All of this is not to say that vigilante justice, imperfect though it may have been, was not needed nor effective. Rather the point is that it established a precedent for the dispensing of "justice" that has detrimentally influenced current attitudes towards violence in America. As a result of vigilante justice people are more apt to feel that they must arm themselves, protect themselves with firearms, and ultimately they are afforded the opportunity to use those arms in a way that may have nothing whatever to do with justice. The vigilante

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\(^2\)Frantz, op. cit., p. 130.
tradition in America—once a necessity—has continued down to the present. Americans continue to this very day to take the law into their own hands as was recently exemplified by the burning of school buses after court ordered busing of blacks to white schools.¹ So popular and respected were the vigilantes in their day that Andrew Jackson, as President of the United States, once recommended that Iowa settlers punish a murderer by vigilante action and as a young man Theodore Roosevelt sought—though unsuccessfully—to join a vigilante band.² Brown concludes that in the shortrun and in practical terms the vigilante movement was a positive facet of the American experience "in that it brought order and stability to many a frontier community which would have otherwise been racked with crime and disorder."³ However the view of the movement over a longer historical perspective is a negative one according to Brown. As he sees it vigilantism came to an end in America around the 1890's but the tradition lives on. The new victims of neovigilantism in the United States have been Catholics, Jews, immigrants, blacks, laboring men and labor leaders, so-called political radicals, and

²loc. cit., p. 192.
³ibid.
proponents of civil liberties. More than any one single indicator of the vigilante tradition in America and the propensity Americans have to commit deadly violent acts is evidenced by the increased number of armed Americans and the teaching of children to arm and to defend themselves with firearms at a very young age. The vigilante experience, once a necessity, has left Americans with a legacy that threatens to do them even greater harm. Mc Cormick—another author—finds that both murder and the sale of firearms are on the increase in America. Although his figures are not the latest they are nonetheless edifying: "The murder rate for 1968, according to F.B.I. figures, was 6.8 victims per 100,000 population as compared to 6.1 in 1967 and 5.6 in 1966." As stated above Americans are increasingly arming themselves: "hand-guns alone going from 496,139 in 1963 to 1,188,000 in 1967, an increase of 139 per cent. Sales of rifles went from 875,440 to 1,882,000 a 115 per cent rise. Importation of hand-guns climbed from 79,000 in 1958 to 747,000 in 1967, and rifles from 198,000 to 239,000." Part of the desire to own a hand-gun has to do with the

1loc. cit., p. 196.
3loc. cit., p. 80.
householders feeling that he must protect his family from unwanted intruders. However the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence reported in 1969 that a study in Detroit found that out of each one thousand home burglaries no more than two were prevented by the home-owner shooting the burglar while 25 persons died from firearm accidents in that same city in 1967. In four and a half years the study found that "only 23 home robbers or burglars were killed by guns."\(^1\) Another misconception which contributes to the American public's vigilante tradition of an armed citizenery is that which attributes to the Second Amendment of the Constitution the right of the public to keep and bear arms when in fact it applies only to a "well regulated militia."

The amendment is as follows:

"A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."\(^2\)

Mc Cormick sees the widespread possession of guns in America as part of the unique tradition of vigilantism in America. That tradition emanating from necessity on the American frontier has proven to be detrimental to succeeding generations of Americans and threatens to be

\(^1\)loc. cit., p. 84.

\(^2\)ibid.
an ever increasing danger to American society. In the American South where the homicide rate is the highest in the country gun control laws are particularly weak and southern congressmen and senators have been traditionally opposed to federal gun regulation. Although in 1968 Congress did pass a weak gun control law prohibiting the interstate mail-order sale of hand-guns and their importation of military surplus hand-guns.¹

"Most of both the successful and unsuccessful attempts on the lives of American Presidents have been made with guns. Presidents assassinated with guns include, Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy. Abortive gun assaults were made on Andrew Jackson, /sic/ Franklin D. Roosevelt, a gun enthusiast and a booster of Western vigilantism, was wounded by a would-be-assassin's gun."²

Gunnar Myrdal the distinguished Swedish scholar and observer of American affairs stated after the assassination of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, not two months apart, that he feared political assassination might become an American custom. Robert Kennedy himself, before his death, pointed out that one out of every 20

¹loc. cit., p. 83.
²loc. cit., p. 82.
assaults with weapons other than a gun resulted in death; with a gun one out of every five assaults resulted in death.¹ Mc Cormick further points out how the arming of the American police is particularly indicative of America's violent heritage. As opposed to European policemen American policemen are more heavily armed and are less restricted in their right to use their firearms. In most countries a policeman may not use his gun unless he is protecting his life or the life of another person. In Germany a policeman firing at a felon must aim at the arms or legs and is periodically tested for accuracy. In European countries many more policemen die in the line of duty as compared to civilians as a result of police activity. In the United States the President's Crime Commission reported in 1967 that for every policeman killed three times that number of civilians were killed by the police. This ratio is supposedly justified in America since its civilian population is more apt to be armed and not psychologically indisposed to shooting and violence. (Precisely the theme of this paper.) The police therefore feel that they cannot risk being too civilized. However statistically this assumption is not altogether bore out. Here in America upwards of 90 out of 100,000 people are killed in mining each year;

¹ibid.
more than 80 per 100,000 in the construction industry each year; more than 70 per 100,000 in farming, and more than 70 per 100,000 in transportation. The figure for policemen killed while on duty is 33 per 100,000.\(^1\) This is not to say that there isn't justification for policemen to be tense while on duty. Rather it seems that the danger of being a policeman is somewhat exaggerated and this often leads to tragic results in the form of civilian casualties. Some of the justification for police tension cited in the introductory chapter has to do with the fact that America has led all other industrialized nations in the total number of homicides for a good number of decades\(^2\) and as cited earlier—the gun has traditionally been the means by which Americans have killed their fellow Americans.

Other forms of violence that bear mention which have traditionally been and in some instances continue to be a part of American violence include such phenomena as labor violence, penal violence, anti-intellectualism, and last but by no means least what might be called business violence. (The latter two forms while not conforming to the definition of violence stated in

\(^1\)loc. cit., p. 81.
\(^2\)loc. cit., p. 79.
chapter one may be viewed as manifestations of the American propensity toward violence.) Louis Adamic in an article aptly titled "From Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America,"¹ points out that labor's impulse to violence—to dynamite, arson, and assassination in the late 1880's was heightened by their unjust treatment and failure to achieve the better working conditions they sought. It appears that the laboring man who so utterly failed to comprehend the motivation behind blacks burning and looting in the 1960's almost 100 years earlier would have done even more to gain a fairer proportion of the benefits allocated by society. With regard to labor violence's role in maintaining a traditionally violent America, the following is illuminating. Vorse² in her account of the Chicago massacre of 1936 tells of the beatings and shootings by police of peaceful strikers at the Republic Steel Mills in Chicago which resulted in the deaths of eighteen and the serious injury of many others. She also tells of Mrs. Tupe Marshall, a mother of three and social worker who was beaten while trying to aid others and later arrested and accused of being a Communist.

¹Rose, op. cit., p. 141.
²Vorse, Mary Heaton, "Violence--The Chicago Massacre" in Rose pp. 148-157.
"It is nothing new. The use of the police by the mills to shoot steel workers asking for their constitutional rights is an old story. The shooting of workers in steel began in Homestead in 1892 and has gone on steadily ever since. In the steel strike of 1919, twenty-one people were killed, including Fannie Sellins who was shot by gunmen as she bent over some children to protect them. They killed steel workers in Ambridge in 1933."¹

Vorse further points out that the killing of United Mine Workers in their long struggle to organize was also very common as was the killing of textile workers. The purpose for the killings always being the same: "... to crush the workers' lawful right to organize." What was new about the "Chicago massacre," she contends, was that the once common defense of the police—perjury—was refuted. It was proven that "wholesale murder" was planned beforehand and that the collaboration of the mills was not in doubt in spite of their efforts to propagandize the public into believing that it was the workers who were violent.² Recently one of the most shocking and horrendous episodes of labor violence has again been connected with the United Mine Workers. This time it apparently involved efforts to organize a more representative, less corrupt union. The result was the slaying of a union reform candidate, his wife and their daughter.

¹loc. cit., p. 156.
Another aspect of American brutality has to do with Americans' traditional attitude towards their penal systems. Much has been said about penal reform but bestial conditions are allowed to continue in our prison systems. Specifically I refer here to the violence to the human body many prisoners suffer in our "correctional institutions." Sexual assaults have been found to be epidemic in our prison systems. According to one reporter—Alan J. Davis—the youngest and least hardened criminals suffer the most. Also prevalent and commonly reported are an array of the most dehumanizing conditions conceivable to man and all is done in the name of reform! An expert on prisons comments:

"Maybe we should be honest with ourselves; if what we want is vengeance, we've got pretty good models going right now. If we want to make streets and our property safer, we had better redefine what those places with their walls and guns are required to do. Prison is terrible enough in itself. Extra savagery is not needed."¹

America has also been noted for its anti-intellectualism. Abrahamsen sees anti-intellectualism as but another manifestation of the violent impulses of Americans. He goes on to note that anti-intellectualism is another extension of America's glorification of the "man of action" rather than "the man of ideas."²

²Abrahamsen, op. cit.
Interestingly, Abrahamsen sees America's tradition of "rugged individualism" stoutly advocated by big business as another form of hidden aggression in that this mode of thought has allowed many underprivileged Americans who for legitimate reasons could not compete to just barely exist. As an example of the above cited in Abrahamsen's *Our Violent Society*: the United States, the wealthiest nation on the globe did not have a welfare department for its people until 1929 while European countries had such departments many years earlier. In this same vein Abrahamsen adds the following:

"Throughout history governments have evinced a lack of awareness, a lack of conscience regarding the welfare of their people. But that we, the foremost land of bounty, could go through three years of a degrading and agonizing depression without much help forthcoming from our Federal government indicates a specific national brand of hidden violence."¹

Rose astutely points out that it is the "respectable citizens" who allow and encourage brutality, murder, and violence in the forms of hunger, poverty, and the cruel neglect that the poor suffer daily in this country and throughout the world. It must also be added if we are to get to the bottom of the American character that big business is easily one of if not the most dominant perpetrators of violence to the individual in our society

¹loc. cit., p. 59.
and to one degree or another throughout the world. For a more obvious example of what might be termed business violence I quote Ralph Nader:

"The current assault on the health and safety of the public from so many dangerous industrial products, by-products, and goods has resulted in violence that dwarfs the issue of crime in the streets. (During the last three years, about 260 people have died in riots in American cities; but every two days, 300 people are killed and 20,000 injured while driving on the highways.) What the consumer movement is beginning to say—and must say much more strongly if it is to grow—is that business crime and corporate intransigence are the really urgent menace to law and order in America."¹

Through it all—the racist attitudes, the frontier and vigilante legacy of violence, the labor strife, the penal bestality, the anti-intellectualism, and the violence of big business, the American people remain unaware of the real significance of it all. Perhaps because for many of them just striving for their daily bread in this land of plenty leaves them to tired to know or care about anything else. Mc Cormick in commenting about the "proverbial innocence" of the American people about themselves says: "With the highest homicide rate of any Western nation, we think of ourselves somehow as more civilized than other peoples. Perhaps it is because we equate plumbing with human progress."²

¹Rose, op. cit., p. 200.
²Mc Cormick, op. cit., p. 124.
THE AMERICAN CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

Graham and Gurr, co-directors of a task force which studied the historical and comparative perspectives of violence in America (The History Of Violence In America, cited earlier) believe that evidence that culture is a powerful determinant "of man's propensity for violence" is the "fact that Manhattan Island (population 1.7 million) has more murders per year than all of England and Wales (population 49 million)."¹ According to another author, Roy G. Francis,² force, speed, and violence characterize American culture and appear in virtually every aspect of American life. These three themes according to Francis are characteristically employed by the mass media from paperback books to television. Also prevalent in American society according to Francis is the use of children's comics and "manly" sports to display an inordinate amount of physical violence. It is perhaps significant that football is beginning to replace baseball as our national sport; hockey an even faster, more forceful, and violent sport is rapidly attaining wide

¹Graham and Gurr, op. cit., p. 802.

popularity; and karate a potentially lethal martial art is currently being taught at some of our best secondary schools to pre-teenagers, teenagers and adults, of both sexes. Francis sees the three themes of speed, force, and violence as "the major modes of action that will shape the emerging society."\(^1\) He thinks that the spread of violence into areas of life which were once calm can be easily predicted. An example of this, he suggests, may be the now almost commonplace use of violence by minority groups to achieve certain ends. I would submit that violence associated with national, state, and local politics has also become more prevalent in the recent past. Francis further points out that Americans are a striving, competitive people. As one of the all-time great and much revered managers of professional football—Vince Lombardi—once said "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing!" In America success is everything. The ends often become more important than the means and the means for attaining success are too often quickly forgotten. As a result many authors, Seymour Martin Lipset among them in his book *The First New Nation*,\(^2\) point out that the game is often not played fairly nor

\(^{1}\)loc. cit., p. 155.

according to the rules. Daniels and Gilula—two psychiatrists—have found that violent behavior in a cultural or subcultural group usually reflects basic group values and hence the behavior which they consider adaptive. It is almost as if they are referring directly to the United States in their following remarks:

"In cultures where achievement, self-reliance, and individual self-interest are valued highly, one also finds a relatively high incidence of personal crime, and a society characterized by a relatively high degree of bellicosity. From the social learning theory we infer that as long as a society values and accepts violence as an effective coping strategy, violent behavior will continue."¹

Another problem associated with violence in the United States is the fact that violence or killing is sometimes a "legitimate" means of coping or resolving conflict should the cause be a just one. Capital punishment (in the past) and wars are seen as adaptive strategies which give sanction to the use of violence to resolve conflicts. Other things which sanction violence in American society according to these psychiatrists are "an ethos glorifying courage, worshipping military heroism, and extolling self-protection by brute strength and firearms."² Substantiating the preceding quote is the far greater

²loc. cit., p. 425.
aggressiveness on the parts of men as compared to women which in turn raises questions about the male role itself in incidents of violence.

Perhaps of paramount importance in perpetuating any given culture—be it aggressive or non-aggressive, violent or non-violent—is the socialization of the young i.e., child rearing practices administered by both parents and society in general. There have been cross-cultural comparisons made between such indicators of violence in a society as "incidence of personal crime; emphasis on military glory; bellicosity of a society; and killings, torturing, or mutilating one's enemies" with child rearing practices. It was found that of the four indicators of violence above, three occurred more frequently in cultures with the following child rearing practices:

1. High positive pressure is exerted by adults toward making children behave
   (1) in a self-reliant manner and
   (2) in a high achieving manner.

2. Exclusive mother-son sleeping arrangements (i.e., absence of father from the room) last for prolonged periods of greater than one year.1

While this cross-cultural comparison shows correlation it does not positively indicate causation. Yet it does however suggest a relationship which appears significant.

1 loc. cit., p. 82.
Going a step further Ilfeld\(^1\) reasons that if modeling and imitative behavior have been found to encourage children to commit violent acts upon large dolls (a Bandura, Ross and Ross experiment to be discussed later) then cross-culturally there could very possibly be a correlation between the amount of personal violence in the form of crime and the emphasis placed upon military glory. What he found was a very high statistical significance in a sample of thirty cultures. As mentioned earlier "in cultures where military glory is emphasized, there is a high incidence of personal crime; the converse holds for cultures with low emphasis on military glory."\(^2\) Under the heading of "Guidelines for Educational Programs," Rosenthal and Ilfeld, both psychiatrists, make the following recommendations towards the reduction of violence in American society. Firstly they recommend that excessively punitive child-rearing practices be modified. The danger here is that the child will imitate or identify with the punitive parent's behavior and thereby be encouraged to become violent. Rather understanding, affection and limit setting are seen to be much more successful in controlling the behavior of children without future adverse effects. Secondly,

\(^{1}\)loc. cit., p. 391.

\(^{2}\)loc. cit., p. 82.
children who lack adequate parental models "should be provided with competent, respected, non-violent adults" to model themselves after. Be they in the form of "foster parents, big brothers" or others. Thirdly it is recommended that a constructive channeling of aggression be encouraged. Such areas as "art, science, service projects, some sports, (apparently as participants rather than observers) and non-violent political protest" are mentioned as possible areas for displacement of violent impulses. Fourthly since the ability to perceive and understand another's feelings often dissolves anger and resultant violent behavior, the authors recommend that programs which would develop "mutual understanding and empathy" between "individuals and groups" be initiated. These could be in small group settings, the accurate portrayal of feared or unknown groups on the mass media, or role-taking encounters in which non-violent responses to anger are rehearsed. Fifthly the publication and encouragement of alternatives to violence such as "negotiation and non-violent protest" should be employed. Lastly the authors feel that educational programs should make known what has been learned from animal studies with regard to conditions which prompt violent behavior. For example, situations in which an animal's status is threatened, or his personal territory is threatened, or pain is induced, or a condition of
overcrowding is created. Other factors such as learning experiences, cultural values, and frustration also induce violence as will social conflict if it and these other factors are not taken into consideration and allowances made for them.\(^1\) Ilfeld concludes by saying that violent behavior may be unlearned; frustrations alleviated; weapons limited; "and men can find peaceful alternatives for resolving conflict."\(^2\)

Lewis Yablonsky in an article entitled "The Violent Gang,"\(^3\) which reveals something about American culture as it relates to youth gangs, sees the violent youth gang—in spite of its "modern day outlaw status" as very much in keeping with the American dream of achieving success i.e., status and prestige. As one gang member puts it:

"I'm not going to let anybody be better than me and steal my 'rep' ... when I go to a gang fight, I punch, stomp, and stab harder than anyone."\(^4\)

Could the latter be an example of that old American competitiveness (any job worth doing is worth doing well) combined with Seymour Martin Lipset's belief that

\(^1\)loc. cit., p. 393.
\(^2\)ibid.
\(^3\)Endleman, op. cit., p. 233.
\(^4\)ibid.
Americans driven by the two themes of equality and achievement often settle for success at any price with means giving way completely to the achievement of ends; and a generous dose of American ultra-violence?

Aside from the overwhelming presence of firearms and the outrageously high number of homicides committed in America, the American culture of violence is most conspicuously and pervasively manifested in the nation's mass media of communications. Television and films are the two forms most likely to reach the American public therefore they deserve special attention. Clive Barnes a Broadway critic makes an interesting point regarding the nature of television and its effect upon the viewer. He states that somehow the millions of people who watch television regard such tragic events as the Viet Nam War as a kind of spectator sport. Somehow the full signifi­cants of the tragic events being shown are unconsciously lost by the mind's eye in a haze of TV and film carnage: "we are no longer completely sure whether we are seeing our sons and brothers being killed on a newsreel or a few Hollywood actors biting the dust on the Late, Late Show."¹ I think the point is that television or film violence in its fictionalized form desensitizes us to real televised or film violence and perhaps to real

everyday violence in a similar transformational sense. Experiments which will be discussed below have demonstrated that violence shown on the mass media may have a definite modeling or imitative effect and if this is true would not such violence also have a desensitizing effect upon viewers—especially impressionable and immature ones? George Willey, a newspaper columnist makes a similar point when he says that the problem with televised violence is not that it is so "emotionally upsetting or esthetically displeasing but that it is accepted as a representation of the way things really are."¹ In his words: "The objection to violence is not directed so much to the effect of violence but to the constant use of violence and the implicit suggestion that it should be anticipated wherever one goes."² Siegel, a child psychologist, points out that due to the fidelity and vividness of television and film (it appeals to man's two most primary senses—sight and sound) both "fact and fancy" share an "inherent authenticity" when viewed on television or on a motion picture screen.³ With regard to the modeling effect of television upon children Siegel relates an amusing story which occurred in Britain:

¹ibid.
²ibid.
³loc. cit., p. 211.
"Presenting a resolution urging the government to consider a code of conduct to guide people responsible for selecting television programs, Fred Armstrong, a member of the Rural District Councils association, speaking at its annual conference, said that during one half-hour program the word 'bloody' had been used 20 to 40 times.

Was it surprising, he asked, when a 6-year old boy told a woman in a shop she was a 'bloody silly old moo' because his favorite candy was sold out?"\(^1\)

While this incident is amusing many others are reported where children were seriously injured by imitating their television or film hero's acts of daring. The results of a study conducted by Bandura, Ross and Ross\(^2\) upon children ranging in age from thirty-five to sixty-nine months, revealed that the children who were exposed to film violence (an adult model beating on a Bobo doll) exhibited nearly twice as much aggression than did the children in the control group who did not see the film when both groups were given an opportunity to assault the Bobo doll. The experimentors concluded from this and other similar studies that:

"Film aggression not only facilitated the expression of aggression but also effectively shaped the form of the subjects' aggressive behavior. The finding that children modeled their behavior to some

\(^1\)loc. cit., p. 212.

extent after the film characters suggests that pictorial mass media, particularly television, may serve as an important source of social behavior."¹

Conceding that televised violence does very possibly have an effect upon the mind of a child, the reader may next question the effect upon the minds of the adults in the audience. An illustration may be helpful in this regard. On December 13, 1966 a filmed drama entitled The Doomsday Flight was aired by the National Broadcasting Company. In the film a bomb was placed upon a transcontinental airliner by a deranged man who teased officials involved with information related to the placing of the bomb—apparently while the plane was in flight—all very suspenseful. Before the film was presented the Air Lines Pilot's Association urged NBC not to air it in the interest of public safety since experience had shown that such programs provoke and suggest mentally unstable people to perform similar acts. During the week after the showing of The Doomsday Flight eight hoax calls were made to various United States airlines; one while the show was still being aired. According to the Federal Aviation Agency these eight calls equalled the total number of such calls made for the entire previous month.²

¹Bandura, Albert, Ross, Dorothea, Ross, Sheila A., "Imitation of Aggressive Models," in Endleman, pp. 146-147.
²Daniels, op. cit., p. 213.
With regard to the prevalence of violence in the communication media Singer states that this prevalence is "of course partially cultural" and that the appeal of Western movies in the United States is similar to the appeal of Samurai films in Japan or Roman epics in Italy in that they grow out of the nation's past history and serve to allow males in particular to identify with demonstrations of physical prowess and daring which are otherwise lacking in their everyday existences. However he does not believe that a careful review of the formal scientific literature, relative to whether violence in the news or fiction on both television and film would yield evidence to support the claim that such demonstrations would increase violence in the larger society. Rather it is his feeling—which I would add would seem to be much more difficult to prove than a correlation between violent behavior in a society and that society's television and film content—that the occurrence of three major wars within a 25 year period, the vast increase in military emphasis in the United States as compared to the 1920's or 1930's, the greater availability of weapons after World War II, and "the frustration of the greatly increased hopes of the urban masses seem far more

critical factors." Yet even Singer concludes that pending greater experimental research it would perhaps be wise for the communications media to observe some internal restraints upon programming with regard to violence especially since current experimental research does indicate a possibility of negative effects from the showing of media violence. So he does concede in the end what researchers such as Geen (1967), Berkowitz (1968), and Hoyt and Tannenbaum have found: namely, that aggressive behavior increases after viewing violent films and that "frustration associated with aggressive cues produced aggressive reactions." Siegel in summarizing his article rejects the theory so long espoused by media spokesmen that people are "purged" of violent impulses through vicarious experiences of violence offered by the mass media (cathartic effect theory). Rather he asserts that both TV and film "can be said to teach the A,B,C's of violence." It appears that the latter impression is also shared by some people in the mass media itself. After the murder of Senator Robert Kennedy a TV producer published the following statement in a trade newspaper:

1 loc. cit., p. 54.  
2 loc. cit., p. 55.  
3 loc. cit., p. 44.  
4 Daniels, op. cit., pp. 236-237.
"In the name of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy and my family, I make this solemn pledge: I will no longer lend my talents in any way to add to the creation of a climate for murder. I call upon all who read this to join me in refusing to write, direct, produce, act, or participate in any way in the shaping of any 'entertainment' that celebrates senseless brutality, aimless cruelty, pointless and violent death."¹

Jerry Paris, the author of the above statement, obtained 350 signatures to his statement from other entertainers. Unfortunately movies and TV seem to be more violent and bloodier than ever as each day passes. A question which may arise at this point is why so much violence on our mass media? The answer may be a very simple one, one which the reader has probably thought of himself: because violence (and sex) is very profitable. Both attract and hold a mass audience's attention—they fascinate the viewer. Profit it appears has again been placed above the public welfare. This seems to be true not only for the adult population but also for children as indicated earlier. Frederic Wertham, a psychiatrist, feels that comic books are worst of all. In his book, Seduction of the Innocent, he documents an "assortment of instances of torture, assault, sexual delinquency, truancy and mayhem triggered by comic books."² According to

¹loc. cit., p. 232.
²Endelman, op. cit., p. 113.
Ellison\textsuperscript{1} the preponderance of political power in America is held by merchants more commonly referred to as businessmen. And it is their historic right to hold such power as he sees it since the American Revolution was not fought "to eradicate British mercantilism but to exploit it to local advantage." The merchant had a recognized right to make money so long as he did not harm the public too severely.\textsuperscript{2} During the Spanish-American war merchants went so far as to sell poisoned tinned beef to the United States Army prompting extensive research to determine what kinds of materials were harmful to people's bodies. Ellison feels that we need similar federal research to determine what causes people's minds to be poisoned. He concludes the article with a plea to seize control of the most powerful image-making devices in our society from "single-minded" merchants who presently control them to sell merchandise without regard for social values. "At some point, the merchant must be divested of his control of social imagery, held socially accountable for what he does, tamed, and assigned to his proper subordinate role in the total society."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}ibid.
\textsuperscript{2}loc. cit., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{3}loc. cit., p. 118.
By way of solution to the problem of violence on the mass media and its repercussions in the larger society Rosenthal and Ilfeld have suggested the following:

1. reduce violence on both television and motion pictures screens in both real and fictious forms. There is a question here in my mind as to whether real violence in the mass media should be shown although of course not condoned. The real, stark, brutal, often cowardice forms of violence often committed may persuade an audience that violence is not the glamorous, thrilling, manly thing that is often portrayed in fiction. The following point is related.

2. discredit violence occurring in the mass media rather than glorifying or rewarding it while at the same time revealing its destructive consequences fully.

3. develop educational programs on the mass media which deal with the limited usefulness of violent behavior and the potential usefulness of non-violent behavior.

4. establish professional and ethical standards within the mass media for governing the amount and types of violence allowable.

Siegel also suggests some positive solutions towards the improvement of TV programming one of which is to seek "new and better ways to entertain and inform." It seems that this is indeed beginning to take place to a very limited extent with such popular shows as All in the

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1Daniels, op. cit., p. 396.
2loc. cit., p. 227.
Family along with well produced news and documentary shows but it appears that much of television viewing remains violent, nonsensical, and insultingly, mentally retarding. It should also be made known that according to the findings of Bandura, Ross and Ross and others cited earlier that TV and filmed violence is not the harmless or cathartic phenomenon people have been lead to believe it is. In fact people should be made aware that the mugging that they cherish that evening on TV may be imitated on the next block a half an hour later by some resourceless, impressionable youth. Similarly the glorification of military conquest seen on the motion picture or TV screen may very well influence people's votes at the polls next year in favor of the bomb them into submission candidate. The implication to be drawn from the thousands of shootings and other more exotic forms of homicide which the American child has wittingly or unwittingly witnessed during his or her most formative years while viewing the TV screen is that he will somehow grow up thinking that violence is almost a usual daily occurrence; something to be expected almost; and perhaps the sure and ultimate solution to very difficult and perplexing social or personal problems. When all else fails perhaps a punch in the nose, a bullet to the head, or more bombs will be the be-all-end-all solution. These
assumptions are in part substantiated by the studies mentioned earlier. Some would be very difficult to prove; they are offered here only for the reader's consideration and may possibly suggest further inquiry.

Siegel concludes that "every civilization is only twenty years away from barbarism," since it takes that amount of time to civilize infants born each year. He goes on to say that "the barbarism must be tamed if civilization is to survive," and that this taming or socializing relies upon the learning abilities of "these small savages."¹ One may extrapolate this thesis by looking at the most influential people and things available to the child along with looking at his social and cultural environment. Today by the time an American child reaches age 16 he or she has reportedly spent as many hours watching television as hours spent in school.² And if what he or she has been watching is the usual children's TV fare: an unlimited amount of violence in cartoons, westerns, and mystery shows has been seen. The American child has seen such notorious "peace keepers" as Judge Roy Bean, Wyatt Erp, and Doc Holliday—all of television or motion picture fame blast their way across the West, and into our living rooms to win a place in

¹loc. cit., p. 223.
²ibid.
the American heart and mind as both good men of the law and perhaps as inspirations to some fledgeling, presently down-and-out bank robbers. Such it seems is the American dream: to live one's life like the heroes of the silver screen ... and as this dream begins to become a reality for many in American society our's is encouraged to become more and more a violent society.

In the year 1967 someone in the United States was shot to death on the average of once every twenty-five minutes;¹ it appears that both criminals and police officers alike in this country are much more apt to resort to deadly force—the primary instrument being the handgun—than their counterparts in other industrialized nations. The following table places the United States in cross-cultural perspective in regards to deaths due to firearms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Homicide Number</th>
<th>Homicide Rate</th>
<th>Suicide Number</th>
<th>Suicide Rate</th>
<th>Accidents Number</th>
<th>Accidents Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>(1966) 14</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>(1963) 8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹loc. cit., p. 42.
²loc. cit., p. 244.
(continued)

DEATHS DUE TO FIREARMS IN FOURTEEN COUNTRIES, TOTAL NUMBER AND RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION [IN REVERSE ORDER]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Homicide</th>
<th></th>
<th>Suicide</th>
<th></th>
<th>Accidents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand (1962)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (1962)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan (1965)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy (1964)</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Fed. Repub. (1965)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France (1965)</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England, Wales (1966)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark (1965)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (1966)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (1965)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia (1965)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A. (1965)</td>
<td>6,855</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10,407</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2,558</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Americans have long praised military heroes just as police officers have been awarded citations of honor for using their guns efficiently whether on the target range or in the streets. The western hero with his six-guns blazing away is apparently still seen by many as the solution to many of contemporary society's complex ills. In a book by Michael Banton about both British and American police he has the following to say about what may be the ultimate American status symbol for young and

old alike be it in its real cold steel form or a plastic facsimile.

"To the visiting European it appears as if the revolver is the prime symbol of virility: a man without a gun who cannot shoot is a poor creature. When people possess guns there is a standing temptation to use them even when circumstances do not justify their use, and this increases the policeman's burden considerably."

Along with the gun Americans it seems are increasingly being fascinated by drugs. The authors of "Drug Use and Violence," Jared R. Tinklenberg and Richard C. Stillman both M.D.'s find that guns, drugs and violence are often related. They state that the association of drugs and violence is recorded as early as 150 B.C. when after a victorious battle Gallic soldiers would drink intoxicating beverages and sometimes start a battle among themselves. They further state that although some drugs have the ability to reduce violent outbursts some drugs have a converse effect predisposing the user to commit violent acts. Before going any further it would be useful to define the term drug. Tinklenberg and Stillman describe it as "any substance that when physically taken into the body can produce a temporary or permanent change in a person's neuro-physiological functions, thoughts, feelings, or behavior."2

1Daniels, op. cit., p. 327.
2loc. cit., p. 328.
According to the authors amphetamines— the drug commonly called "speed"— is one drug which may contribute towards anger and assaultive behavior. These drugs make the user more apt to take physical action, more apt to be impulsive, more apt to be paranoid and therefore carry concealed weapons, and finally when the effects of the drug have worn off or the user is "coming down" he is most prone to aggressive behavior.

Marihuana, an increasingly popular drug of middle American, middle class youth is not considered by the authors to predispose a user towards violence. Rather it is apt to make a user immobilized and lethargic or as the kids say "stoned." Which as it turns out is an apt term since such drug usage is more likely to predispose one to become a receiver of violence rather than a perpetrator.

Alcohol while not considered to be associated with violence as often as are amphetamines is more closely associated with violence than is marihuana.¹ In fact with its wide use and distribution, alcohol may be considered the most dangerous of drugs. In a number of studies alcohol has been associated with over fifty per cent of violent crimes to include murder and assault. It is also associated with about fifty per cent of the

¹loc. cit., p. 348.
automobile accidents which occur in the United States.\(^1\) LSD or lysergic acid diethylamide apart from possible violence to the user due to "bad trips" is seen by the authors as not likely to be associated with violence since "the user's attention usually is directed inward toward his own experiences" while "external events have little significance."\(^2\)

With regard to opiates such as heroin, morphine, and opium, the authors refute the evidence that "hard-core narcotics" use inevitably leads to violence and criminality. Although it is true that "hard-core narcotics" addicts often turn to crime to support a habit they could not otherwise support, their crimes are usually directed against property with nonviolent behavior predominating. Violent behavior is however not unlikely should an addict undergo a period of withdrawal from opiates. Then in a sickened, desperate condition the addict may commit acts of violence.\(^3\)

The association with barbiturates or sedative-hypnotics and violence is characterized as unusual and in general as suppressors of violence rather than elicitors. The danger involved with barbiturate use as

\(^1\)ibid.
\(^2\)ibid.
\(^3\)loc. cit., pp. 350-351.
with opiate use is primarily to the user in the form of death due to an overdose. Barbiturates may also be lethal when combined with the use of alcohol since both drugs have a depressant effect. Violence may also occur during withdrawal from barbiturates the effects of which are similar to withdrawal from alcohol.¹

To conclude this section on drugs and violence, Tinklenberg and Stillman find that "violence results from an interplay of drug and nondrug factors that include type of drug, dosage, modality and frequency of use, personality of users, age of the users, expectations of peers, and availability of weapons."² In spite of all this qualifying verbiage it appears that there often is a relationship between the use of violence and the current use of some drugs—to include alcohol—either to the self, another, or to property.

From all of the foregoing I believe one may reasonably conclude that there are many facets to the culture of American violence. The following chapter will conclude this paper by looking closer at possible solutions to American violence and highlight the relationship between violence and democracy in contemporary America.

¹loc. cit., pp. 353-354.
²loc. cit., p. 361.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter I shall attempt to bring together some of the thinking of various men from the social and medical sciences, the conclusions reached by various study groups which have delved into recent political and social unrest in America, and lastly I shall conclude with a section on violence and democracy—all in an effort to inform, to explain and hopefully to stimulate the amelioration of what might be called the present and perspective specter of violence in America.

To begin with man himself—as was done in Chapter II—I refer first to ethnologist Lorenz for possible solutions to the problem of controlling the discharge of primal aggression. He believes firstly that investigation of all possibilities for discharging such aggression on substitute objects should be conducted. Secondly he feels sublimation is capable of doing a great deal more "toward the relief of undischarged aggressive drives." Thirdly he sees the promotion of personal acquaintance and friendship between individuals of different nations and ideologies an obvious yet still worth mentioning solution towards the control of "innate" aggression in man. Lastly he thinks that the younger generation should be helped to find "genuine causes" to
devote their intelligence and emotional "militant enthusiasm" to that are "worth serving in the modern world." It is likely that Lorenz has drawn heavily from his countless studies of animals along with corroborating Ardrey's Territorial Imperative when he asserts:

"Anonymity of the person to be attacked greatly facilitates the releasing of aggressive behavior. It is an observation familiar to anybody who has traveled in trains that well-bred people can behave atrociously toward strangers in the territorial defense of their compartment."

 Perhaps it may be concluded that what Lorenz is saying in large part is that all peoples should get to know each other better—communicate and cooperate in striving to reach worthy goals and displace aggressive impulses in socially acceptable ways.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we do not only tolerate violence, we love it. We put it on the front pages of our newspapers, one-third or one fourth of our television programs use it for the amusement of our children. Condone! My dear friends, we love it."

So spoke Karl Menninger quoted in The New York Times newspaper. Abrahamsen, a psychiatrist and author of Our Violent Society, adds that Americans not only condone

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1 Lorenz, op. cit., pp. 267-8.
2 loc. cit., 273.
violence but devour the details of violent occurrences with "a great deal of fascination and relish,"¹ and in so doing express hidden violence. Abrahamsen like many others believes that the first step in solving a problem is to acknowledge it. "We all need to face the fact that American society is a violent one." Anticipating his critics he further asserts: "To admit that our society is violent would not at all mean that we had become victims of defeatism; it would mean, rather, that we were realistic in our appraisal of the situation."² With regard to solutions to the problem of American violence, he offers such suggestions as treatment and rehabilitation centers for those who suffer from diminished consciousness and stricter gun control. On this latter point a recent TV news report has shown that even in states which have more strict gun control laws than others there remains an easy access to hand-guns from illegal sources. The reporter therefore concluded that federal legislation is necessary to prevent guns from being brought in from other states and sold illegally. An even better solution to the problem as it relates to the use of firearms for law enforcement officers and protection of private citizens in their homes would be

¹Abrahamsen, op. cit., p. 35.
²loc. cit., p. 249.
the adoption and use of "stun-guns" i.e., non-lethal weapons. This is especially worth a trial effort in light of the large number of civilians killed each year by this nation's peace officers. In connection with both mental illness and crime, Abrahamsen wonders whether the correlation between emotional disturbances and crime--possibly reflected in America's crime statistics--makes America the most mentally ill nation in the world--a charge which he concedes would be impossible to prove since too many variables are to be accounted for. Other solutions which Abrahamsen suggests are early detection of potentially dangerous persons through the establishment of a broad mental hygiene program with community clinics where people with emotional problems could go for treatment. He also feels that a Federal research institute should be established "for the study and treatment of violence and social pathology." Among other measures to be taken to prevent violence in American society, he mentions better housing and work programs for unskilled and skilled workers of all races, but most importantly he feels that the most successful and basic means to prevent violence in our society is to "develop healthy feelings within the family." This begins with

\[1\] loc. cit., p. 253.
\[2\] loc. cit., p. 254.
correct child rearing practices. It is his belief that often times parents who resort to slapping children all too readily set a poor example for the child. Violence is thereby seen by the child as the most immediate means of settling a dispute. With regard to televised and film violence, Abrahamsen sees these as having a modeling effect rather than a vicarious and cathartic effect upon the viewer. He believes that violence viewed on television or in films may serve as a stimulus which will trigger off hostile actions in those who are too weak to control their violent inclinations.¹ One could reasonably conclude in regards to televised and film violence that he would be in favor of at least limiting its scope if not eradicating it completely.

From a psychiatrist's point of view, Abrahamsen finds nothing unusual about the difficulty which Americans have admitting that something is wrong with American society. As individuals it is difficult to admit our flaws; we like to emphasize the positive; as a nation we are optimists and unfortunately even major shocks like the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, and the attempt on the life of governor George Wallace appear to many

¹loc. cit., p. 256.
Americans only as minor aberrations in the nation's carrying on of business as usual. (Americans as of 1964 have had the highest murder rate of all civilized nations in the world.)¹

"The only avenue left to our violent society is to scrutinize ourselves, lay bare our faults, no matter how painful and upon a foundation of enlightenment build a life meaningful for everyone. Maybe then, through our violence, through that by which we have fallen so deep, we may also rise above our frustration and fear."²

The wealth and riches of the United States is seen by Abrahamsen as creating opportunity on the one hand and aggression on the other. The more the riches to be gained the more people have to be violent about. Looked at from another perspective however one may say the more riches there are to be shared. Perhaps our economic system (capitalism) and the extraordinary emphasis on competition rather than cooperation have a great deal to do with American violence. Finally Abrahamsen believes the only way to overcome violence is to eliminate the frustrations, fears, and hate which encourage people to act.

¹Russett, Bruce N., Alker, Howard R., Jr., Deutsch, Karl W., Lasswell, Harold D., with the assistance of Bunselmeyer, Robert, Einstein, James, Gray, Robert, Murphy, Russell, Shingler, John, Singleton, Seth, and Stevens, Steven, World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964, (Table E 29) 99-100.

²Abrahamsen, op. cit., p. 270.
violently. This would involve a change in our basic institutions and in our individual emotional make-ups. The likelihood of such changes coming about quickly is almost non-existent. However the alternative is increasing amounts of violence in our society so it becomes apparent we must begin.

The Skolnick Report To The National Commission On The Causes and Prevention of Violence lists three "critical points" regarding violence and protest in America. To paraphrase they are 1) that relatively little violence has accompanied contemporary civil strife (i.e., demonstrations and group protest) 2) it is often difficult to determine whether the dissidents or the institutionalized authorities were responsible for out-breaks of violence (e.g., the Walker report and other studies indicate that the authorities often bear a large part of the responsibility) and 3) mass protest, even if not violent, must be "analyzed in relation to crises in American Institutions." The report states further that:

"The proposition that domestic political violence has been unnecessary to achieve political goals is ambiguous, but it is historically fallacious no matter how one interprets it. If it means that the established machinery has permitted major 'out-groups' to move nonviolently up the politico-economic ladder, it is demonstrably false. On the contrary, American institutions seem designed to facilitate the advancement of talented individuals rather than of oppressed groups. Groups engaged in mass
violence have done so only after a long period of fruitless, relatively nonviolent struggle."

The report further indicates that according to their findings mass protest is essentially:

"a political phenomenon engaged in by normal people; that demonstrations are increasingly being employed by a variety of groups, ranging from students and blacks to middle-class professionals, public employees, and policemen; that violence, when it occurs, is usually not planned, but arises out of an interaction between protesters and responding authorities, that violence has frequently accompanied the efforts of deprived groups to achieve status in American society; and that recommendations concerning the prevention of violence which do not address the issue of fundamental social and political change are fated to be largely irrelevant and frequently self-defeating."

In sum the report finds that the only road to political and social stability other than a garrison type of order is via political and social reform. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (The Kerner Report) alludes to what has been an area of great unrest in the following recommendation. "This nation will deserve neither safety nor progress unless it can demonstrate the wisdom and the will to undertake decisive

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2loc. cit., pp. xix-xx.
action against the root causes of racial disorder.\(^1\)

Before concluding with a section on violence and democracy something should be said about violence and the "respectable," middle class American citizen. Monsignor Paul Hanley Furfey points out in *The Respectable Murders*\(^2\) that the greatest crimes in history have been committed with the cooperation or at least the passive consent of the "solid citizens" who constitute the "backbone" of most communities. "The great evils, the persecutions, the unjust wars of conquest ... and the exploitations of whole social classes" all of these crimes he contends are committed by "the organized community under the leadership of respectable citizens." Thomas Rose adds that "respectable citizens" often speak out after the fact with respect to violence in societies. Murder, unsafe working conditions, brutality, cruelty, and poverty all recede quickly from our minds according to Rose and speaking out "after the fact becomes violence, too."\(^3\) "What does Hitler expect of the average German?" Another author asks and then replies: "Nothing. Just do your job and mind your own business. It is not the Nazis who are killing the Jews in Germany. It's

\(^1\)loc. cit., p. xxvi.

\(^2\)Rose, op. cit., p. 216.

\(^3\)ibid.
silence!" Perhaps silence on the part of many American citizens both respectable and otherwise played a significant part in killing Vietnamese people for all too long a period of time. Thomas Merton writing in The Catholic Worker believes that Auschwitz worked only with the help of so-called "respectable people:"

"... people wanted it to work. Instead of resisting it, rebelling against it, they put the best of all their energies into making genocide a success. Almost all of them committed gratuitous acts of arbitrary cruelty and violence which were forbidden even by the Gestapo's own rules .... There can be little doubt that many of these men tortured and killed because they thoroughly enjoyed it. (Men ... will instinctively welcome and submit to an ideology which enables them to be violent and destructive without guilt.) ... we have no need of monsters: ordinary policemen and good citizens will take care of everything."¹

Rose points out that people usually view themselves as good and others as evil. Even two of recent America's most violent figures—Al Capone and "Two Gun" Crowley—viewed themselves as merrymaking, kind-hearted, and misunderstood public benefactors. This is "good old" Al speaking:

"I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them have a good time, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man."²

¹loc. cit., p. 33.

The notorious cold blooded killer Crowley is said to have stated in all sincerity: "Under my coat is a weary heart, but a kind one—-one that would do nobody any harm." According to Rose "'We' feel that only 'they' are violent," but, as Jean-Paul Sartre has written, as the dialectic unfolds "'they' will look in the mirror at 'our' violent reflection and meet 'us' with all the violence 'they' can muster."\(^2\)

Finally, if "respectable" middle-class American citizens do not realize that ultimately greater violence may ensue when they opt for "law and order" rather than justice; if they do not recognize their violence—subtle though it may be—-it appears that they will do little of value to deal effectively with American violence as a whole and undoubtedly this failure will allow American violence to continue to escalate.

Violence And Democracy

In any discussion of violence and democracy relevant to contemporary America one must come to terms with the questions of whether violence is at all consistent with the orderly democratic processes of government on the one hand and on the other hand whether violence is

\(^1\)ibid.

\(^2\)Rose, op. cit., p. 37.
acceptable as a last resort in the furtherance of democratic ideals. In order to answer either of these questions it is necessary first to understand that democracy is supposed to be government of, by, and for the people. When government becomes unresponsive to the needs of the people then the people are to express their grievances in an effort to have them redressed. Black people did this in the 1960's and college students and others joined in not only for civil rights but to end the Viet Nam War. At the National Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968 the whole political system seemed to be called into question. An even more probing, problematic and tragically disconcerting question seemed to be hovering above it all with regards to the United States, violence and democracy. That question was and remains: How can a democratic nation succeed in fostering the best it can for the majority of its people when it fails to create a climate in which the very greatest of its leaders can survive let alone function to their optimum. Jealousy, envy, prejudice, and bigotry are evils which probably attack everyone in one way or another and they must be dealt with individually, nationally and on a global scale. But in a society which encourages competitiveness, winning at any expense, and violent action, these evils may very likely be carried to their
logical conclusion: complete annihilation of the com-
petition.

In dealing with the first question one must first
dispel the myth that the democratic process is orderly.
It appears that decisions "of, by, and for the people"
of the United States take place within a climate of
competing points of view. Candidates for political
office plan and work years ahead to ready themselves to
govern and to be elected to public office. John F.
Kennedy did this as did his brother Robert but violence
here in America in the final analysis rendered the
democratic process null and void. More recently perhaps
Watergate, Nixon and his associates tell us much more than
we could ever care to know about other deficiencies in
"the democratic process." We therefore have only one
question to deal with regarding violence and democracy
here in the United States in the year 1975 and that is
whether violence is acceptable as a last resort in the
furtherance, or perhaps more importantly, support of
democratic ideals? Without citing numerous authorities
it appears evident that violence in the streets both in
the forms of street crime and demonstrations in support
of democratic ideals in the decade of the sixties caused
the majority of those voting in the Presidential election
to vote in a slogan in 1968: "law and order." In place
of Robert Kennedy, who had been assassinated at the
crucial moment he appeared to be very possibly the next President of the United States, the American voting public chose a proven political abasement. This is not to say that the riots and burnings in major American cities in the decade of the 60's could have been averted nor that in their wake black people have not been given greater access into American society than had been the case ever before. Nor for that matter that the peace demonstrations and marches were not a necessary and morally laudable reaction to the policies of the United States government with regard to the Viet Nam War. None of this in light of the circumstances could or necessarily should have been different. But in terms of violence in support of democratic ideals it appears that the means does much to subvert the ends even if those ends are in themselves for the ultimate good of all. In the context of contemporary America violence—no matter how limited—is not a very viable solution to remedy injustices. Violence invites further and more forceful violence and the threat of repression by public consent.

How then are the causes of societal unrest to be dealt with from a democratic perspective? The Skolnick Report To The National Commission On The Causes And Prevention Of Violence in America, conducted in 1969, could not be clearer in its conclusions. It finds that a society which expends massive sums for social control
is one which has failed to grapple with effective social reform. In other words it appears that more and more police and riot gear will not solve long standing and very complex social problems nor will simplistic slogans like "law and order" or "America: Love it or leave it." According to the report should these problems not be solved American society will become increasingly armed, threatened and less free. "Little by little, we move toward an armed society which, while not clearly totalitarian, could no longer be called consensual." \(^1\) The report further states that:

"A democratic society cannot depend upon force as its recurrent answer to longstanding and legitimate grievances. This nation cannot have it both ways; either it will carry through a firm commitment to massive and widespread political and social reform, or it will develop into a society of garrison cities where order is enforced without due process of law and without the consent of the governed." \(^2\)

In Howard Zinn's view what is needed and necessary to deter decay and ultimately greater violence in America is "a new politics of protest." He feels pressure must be put on national leaders: "ruffle the complacency of the powerful enough to bring needed changes." Perhaps most importantly he believes old institutions and leaders

\(^1\) Skolnick, op. cit., p. 344.
\(^2\) loc. cit., p. 346.
should be replaced.  

All of this he feels may be accomplished through the use of techniques of non-violent civil disobedience. Zinn has pinpointed two vital areas of needed change in American society if it is to become a more democratic and less violent society. Institutions and leaders must become more responsive to the needs of the people of both the United States and—to an increasing extent—the world. If the latter sounds a bit grand it should be remembered that not too long ago and half a world away Americans fought and died, while at home inflation and massive protests took place—all to a great extent as the result of the problems of the people of Viet Nam. Institutionalized violence in the political structure presently most notably allows special interest groups to exert a disproportionate amount of influence to the detriment of the public welfare. Conspicuous examples are the failure to legislate effective gun control laws and a national health insurance program. Gun lobbies and "sportsmen" allow Americans to perpetually slaughter each other with the greatest of convenience while the American Medical Association representing the medical profession through their lobbying efforts allows millions of Americans to go without adequate health care.

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because they cannot afford it in this the wealthiest nation in the world! In order to make government at all levels more responsive to the people's needs various kinds of people's lobbies are needed similar to those organizations formed by Ralph Nader and others. Also needed are means to monitor the effectiveness of other institutional organizations and their personnel to assure the public that these institutions are doing the things which they were created and designed to do and for which the public's tax dollars and out-of-pocket-money pay. Political campaign financing laws are also very much overdue (as has become increasingly evident) in order that public officials may be allowed to function without becoming beholden to special interests.

Zinn states further that the government of a nation is not synonymous with a people of the nation; nor is it endowed with a sacred aura; rather governments should be "watched, scrutinized, criticized, opposed, changed, and even [as stated in the Declaration of Independence] overthrown and replaced when necessary."¹ That is, when government becomes destructive of the pursuits of life, liberty, and happiness of its citizenry that government should rightly be opposed. Not in the streets however but at the ballot box and in the institutions of society.

¹loc. cit., p. 118.
To sum up the role of psychology, social injustice and politics or more specifically the democratic process in this view of "American the violent" I would like to begin by reiterating that man is not inherently violent in the sense that he is innately predisposed to aggressive behavior. Rather as was stated in Chapter II physical and psychological environments encourage or discourage aggressiveness and violence. America in this paper is seen as a country in which violence is encouraged—mainly by its historical traditions and current culture. With regard to social injustice in American society this paper concludes that reforms are necessary in order to eliminate the pockets of resentment which form when people become aware that they have not been treated fairly or for that matter in accordance with their legal or constitutional rights. Which brings us closer to the role of politics and the democratic process vis-a-vis violence in America. In a pluralistic society—as America is touted as being—conflict is expectable but it need not be overtly violent conflict in which bodily harm is committed or lives are lost. Democracy, viewed here as rule by the ruled, rule by the people or their elected representatives, or rule by the majority, means much more. Democracy is suppose to entitle those represented equal rights before as well as under the law, equal opportunities in an open society and perhaps most
importantly equal treatment despite economic circumstances. All of this sounds very grand again. Yet the democratic ideal is the very foundation upon which this country was founded and should consistently work to realize. When the political process or societal institutions become unresponsive, arrogant, or irrelevant the governed—frustrated or apathetic—realizing the unresponsiveness of their representatives and/or the irrelevance of their institutions may be moved to forms of rebellion or further apathy on a mass or individual scale to the detriment of the entire system. If all people truly have equal rights, opportunities, and treatment and are equally represented then the frustration and resentment which feeds a good deal of violent behavior would be eliminated. Yet it appears that the functioning or the malfunctioning of democracy at times contributes towards unequal, harsh treatment and results here in America. In the case of the unequal treatment of blacks in the past, the majority of whites allowed or encouraged such treatment thereby contributing towards a situation in American society which would be conducive to violent acting out. Democracy functions here in a way which is contrary to its spirit. In the case of the absence of gun control laws and a national health insurance program as in countless other cases powerful special interests are allowed to subvert the democratic process. Democracy
suffers very greatly as a result and more importantly
the people of a democratic society increasingly lose
faith in government and their elected officials. In the
case of gun control most conspicuously it is not only
the democratic process which is subverted but the entire
society suffers greatly by being allowed to be more
violent than is necessary when thousands and thousands
are needlessly killed each and every year. Democracy
malfunctions in the latter instance.

More overt forms of political violence in the recent
past—manifested mainly by political protest and assassi-
nations or attempted assassination of some of the
nation's leading political figures in the nineteen
sixties and early seventies along with air plane high-
jackings, guerrilla type warfare in some of America's
major cities, and some kidnappings are all seen in this
paper as a part of the general tendency in America (and
the world to an increasing extent) to act out in an
aggressive and violent manner. This increased acting
out in an aggressive and violent manner in America is
seen in this paper as having roots in historical tradition
and is currently feed by a heightened culture of violence
as manifested mainly on the mass media, the easy avail-
ability of firearms, the increased pace of life, and the
anonymity which frustrates so many Americans as this
country becomes almost completely urbanized.
In sum America is viewed in this paper as one of if not the most violent of the industrialized nations in that it is a country which was settled by what seemed to be a policy of genocide directed against the indigenous Indian population; it is a country which gained its independence through violent revolution—a time after which a civil war divided and devastated both North and South with great loss of life on both sides; it is a country in which the so-called "winning of the West" involved a reliance upon vigilante justice and in which firearms played a major role; it is a country in which the vigilante tradition and the "right to bear arms" is carried down to present times—glorified on the mass media and in the popular mind to the detriment of all Americans—and finally it is a country in which all Americans—individually and collectively—experience and inordinately high degree of violence of all sorts to include a spectacular gun homicide rate and a greater number of massive military involvements vis-a-vis other industrialized nations. American society as an overtly aggressive very competitive society has fostered in its countrymen a way of thinking which glorifies conflict as opposed to cooperation, a way of thinking in which means are very apt to give way completely to ends and where "winning isn't everything ... it's the only thing." Is it any wonder that thousands and thousands are needlessly killed each
year by firearms, that our prisons are bestial and inhumane, that those speaking out on the most important and vital issues concerning Americans and the world have been clubbed or killed be they in the streets on campuses or directly a part of the political process—in such a society?

Along with the other recommendations offered it seems that if this nation is traditionally, culturally, currently, and perspective a more violent nation then people must work persistently to make it less so by joining something akin to what Reich has envisioned as a cultural revolution:

"There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed, and it cannot be successfully resisted by violence. This is the revolution of the new generation."¹

As he states it violence will not be required for the success of this revolution—indeed it has been made evident that violence in the form of political protest will to a large extent subvert it. However contrary to Reich, state violence may successfully resist such a revolution but likely, ultimately at the complete ruin of the social system we presently call the United States.

There is no choice either. American society will become a more humane, decent, compassionate, cooperative (rather than competitive), and democratic society or it will become an increasingly destructive, violent and repressive society which will in all probability destroy itself eventually ... and wonder how it all came about. The cultural revolution Reich spoke of should not affect the political structure "only as a final act" either if we truly have political leadership or institutions that are capable of responding in time. It appears that if violence in America is to be ameliorated, if Americans recognize that America has been violent in the past, is violent in the present, and promises to be even more violent in the future then each and every one must become a part of that non-violent cultural revolution Reich spoke of and we must be ever mindful:

"... that the Revolution neither starts nor ends, but is a continuing force in human life; that its victories can never be 'defended' nor safe-guarded with guns, laws, purges, presidiums or conventions; that we, in fact, are the Revolution."

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